

Mideast

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off the stage, but he returned five minutes later, smiled broadly, signed the maps and wrote a note on them. Rabin had an aide translate Arafat's note and then added his signature.

U.S. sources traveling with Christopher said Arafat wrote that he was signing the maps but that the exact borders still must be negotiated.

Several other important details remain unresolved, including the precise jurisdiction of the future Palestinian judiciary and how many of an estimated 8,500 Palestinian prisoners Israel will free.

Israel so far has agreed to release 5,000 of them but has resisted calls for the release of 450 to 500 prisoners from the Islamic fundamentalist group Hamas. The first group was released Wednesday.

Also unclear is the thorny issue of who will control Jerusalem and what will happen to Jewish settlements.

Peres offered a good-humored explanation of the ceremony's confusion that brought laughter and cheers from the audience:

"Nowadays, you can watch how birth is being given on television. Now you had have the occasion to watch it. What really happened is that we finished our negotiations by 2:30 in the morning (Wednesday) and apparently we were short by five minutes. We apologize for taking this five minutes from you."

"We had had a dream before we have had a map. Now we have a map and a dream together."

Rabin, in his speech after the agreement was signed, said Wednesday's 11th-hour glitch was a clear example of the hard road ahead.

"The world witnessed the tip of the iceberg of problems that we shall have to overcome in the implementation of even the first phase of the declaration of principles to supercede 100 years of animosity, suspicion and bloodshed. It is not so simple," he said.

Arafat described the accord as a "true beginning to complete the march of peace and guarantee the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people."

Christopher said the agreement showed that "negotiations do work,



Associated Press

PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, right, stands apart Wednesday in Cairo as, from left, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, Russian Foreign Minister

Andrei Kozyrev, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak try to persuade him to sign a self-government pact.

peace is possible."

Later, President Clinton congratulated both Rabin and Arafat in separate telephone calls. He urged them to put the agreement into effect quickly, a White House statement said.

Mubarak, who hosted the signing on his 60th birthday, welcomed "the peace of heroes and brave men." "Caravans are on the move," he said. "It is now time to plant roses in place of barbed wires and land mines."

But in Damascus, both Syria and radical Palestinian groups blasted the accord as a false peace and said it would add new justification for all-out war against Israel.

Abu Ahmed Esam, chief of foreign relations affairs of the fundamentalist Islamic Jihad organization, told

the Reuters news service that his group would step up attacks on Israel to foil the accord which provides for limited Palestinian autonomy and a partial Israeli troop withdrawal from Gaza and Jericho.

The leader of the Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, George Habash, said the agreement was aimed at "eliminating the Palestinian cause and depriving Palestinians of their legitimate rights."

Arafat's reluctance to sign the maps was not entirely unexpected.

In addition to the issue of the size of Jericho and the configuration of Gaza, remaining disputes include Arafat's title in the Palestinian administration and whether uniformed Palestinian police will be stationed at border crossings between Gaza and Egypt and the West Bank and

Jordan.

Sources close to the talks said it was agreed that Arafat's title in the English version of the agreement would be chairman. In the Arabic text it will be referred to as *rais*, a word which can mean either "president" — the title Palestinians prefer — or "chairman."

Israel reportedly has agreed to increase the area around Jericho it is willing to hand over in return for the Palestinians not insisting on having guards at West Bank and Gaza borders.

No firm agreement has been reached on the issues, and the two sides will resume their negotiations this week.

Peyman Pejman is a free-lance journalist based in Cairo.

Guns

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more of the American people support a ban on military-style semi-automatic weapons, Congress is wary of casting a gun control vote and crossing the potent lobbying arm of the NRA.

"The count shows we are between five and 10 votes away in the House with the momentum clearly on our side," said Rep. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., chief sponsor of the House bill. "It's going to be neck and neck. We need every vote we can get. This is going to be some horse race."

Schumer said that for the first time he now believes supporters of a ban can win their uphill battle.

Wayne LaPierre, NRA executive vice president, said supporters of the ban were stalled at 15 to 20 votes shy of the majority. "I think we're going to win," LaPierre said.

Schumer's effort was aided by announcements from Andrews and Coleman, both Democrats, that they would vote for the measure. Both had opposed a similar assault weapons ban in 1991 and Coleman earlier this week issued a statement critical of the current proposed ban.

LaPierre, however, said the NRA has not counted either Andrews or Coleman among their list of supporters. "I don't count them as switches," he said.

"I think it's a reasonable and common sense approach to help law enforcement fight crime in Texas," Andrews said. He said Schumer's measure was much more tightly crafted than the 1991 version, which he claimed could have banned his shotgun.

The measure specifically exempts 650 rifles and shotguns such as Browning and Remington models. It also would ban ammunition clips of more

than 10 rounds. The law itself would expire in 10 years.

Coleman conceded his vote could cost him his job.

"If taking Uzis out of the hands of school kids and making it harder for drug thugs to get the machine guns that wantonly kill our police officers and children is a political offense that costs me my job, then so be it." He said he made up his mind after talking to Clinton in the afternoon and also talking to law enforcement officers from his district.

Rep. Chet Edwards, D-Waco, previously listed as undecided, said he was "leaning in favor of the ban" but wants to be assured the bill does not limit guns used for hunting or self-protection. Edwards voted for the 1991 assault weapons ban after 23 people were massacred at a cafeteria in his district by a gunman. The 1991 version failed by 70 votes.

Rep. Gene Green, D-Houston, may vote against the bill after the House Rules Committee rejected his version of a compromise that would have deleted the definitions of assault weapons.

Green, the House's leading recipient of NRA campaign contributions in 1992, told the Rules Committee he was offering the compromise so he could vote for the bill. Ban supporters said his proposal would undermine the Schumer bill.

Clinton, speaking to a housing group from the Indian Treaty Room, called on people and especially law enforcement officers to contact members of Congress.

"If every law enforcement official who knows every member of Congress would call those people and say, 'This is not a partisan issue; this is a question of law enforcement and safety for Americans and sensible policy,'" Clinton said. "We do understand the difference between being shot at with a revolver and something with 12 rounds, 15 rounds, 30 rounds or 60 rounds. We can count."

Schools

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terrible bind between the demands of work and helping their children grow and learn," Riley said of the current system.

The commission noted that as jobs of the 1990s demand more skills and a higher level of education, students are being asked to learn more in a time frame that has barely budged in a century.

In fact, the average time required in American high schools for the core subjects — English, math, science, history, geography, foreign languages and the arts — has shrunk to 41 percent of the day, the study found. That time has decreased, as nonacademic subjects, such as sex education, instruction on AIDS, and counseling on drug and alcohol abuse, have been added.

One of the commission's most disturbing findings was that Germany, France, and Japan required at least twice the number of hours in core subjects as American high schools. In Germany, the minimum high school requirement in the main subjects is 3,528 hours, compared with 1,460 hours for American students.

"We need to explode the old time metaphors, forget about the 50-minute class and the 180-day year," said Milton Goldberg, executive director of the commission, created in 1991 by Congress. Goldberg directed research for the landmark 1983 "Nation at Risk" report, which warned of the "rising tide of mediocrity" in American schools.

Just as that study set off a decade of school restructuring, he said he is hopeful that this report will spur

local school districts to re-examine the length of class periods as well as the school day and year.

The nine-member commission — educators, business leaders and politicians — declined to recommend the ideal length of the school year, and said local communities would have to make that decision according to their needs.

The report recommended that 5½ hours of every day should be devoted to main academic subjects, instead of the three hours now being spent. Some schools in every community should be open year round and at night, and some students should be given longer to learn than others, who may not need it.

Already, in a growing number of places, summer vacations are being shortened and school days are lengthening to mirror the workday. In Murfreesboro, Tenn., thousands of students attend schools open from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., an arrangement partially being paid for by working parents. And, in Kansas City, Kan., the New Stanley Elementary School operates 11 months of the year for a total of 205 days, with the help of a grant from a private foundation.

Also on Wednesday, President Clinton signed school-to-work legislation aimed at preparing young people for good jobs if they aren't college-bound. The Associated Press reported.

The new law is aimed specifically at training the 75 percent of young Americans who move from school to the workplace without pursuing a four-year college degree.

Under the legislation, the departments of Education and Labor will distribute \$100 million this year to help states, communities, schools, employers and labor unions start building a school-to-work network.

Comics

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smoking!"

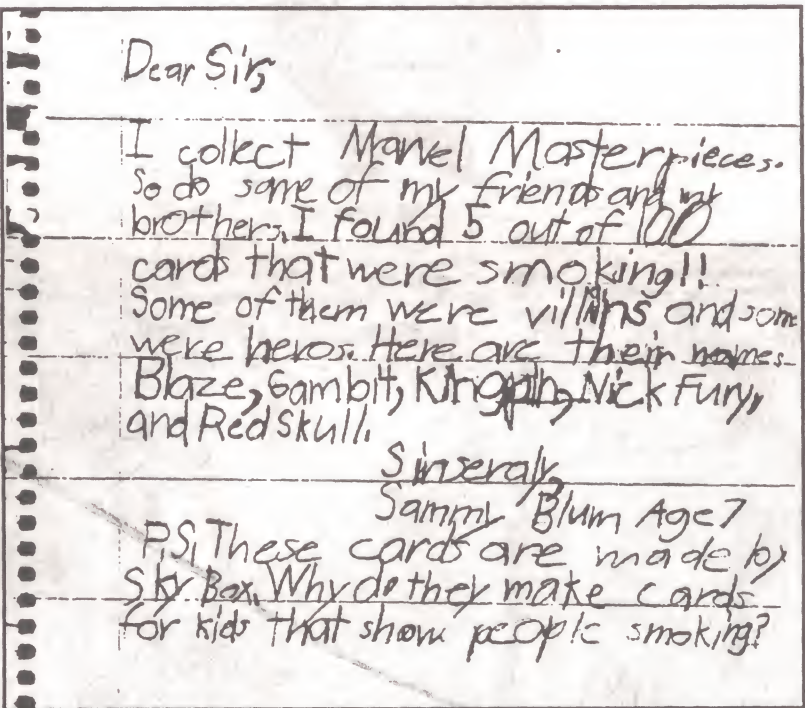
Sammy listed the offending characters, both heroes and villains: Nick Fury, Blaze, Gambit, Kingpin and Red Skull. Fury is smoking a cigar as he takes aim with a high-tech handgun. Blaze, calmly firing a rifle from his motorcycle, has a lit cigarette dangling from his mouth.

The cards are sold nationally in packs about the size of baseball trading cards. They feature glossy, full-color depictions of characters on the front and their biographies on the back.

Are the good guy and bad guy smokers due to be replaced by more current and politically correct characters? "No way," said Marvel spokeswoman Pamela Rutt. "The characters are not going to go away."

"We just agreed from now on to eliminate smoking materials from the trading cards," she said. "The characters are not in a dramatic context so there's no reason to show them smoking."

Fury, a character who debuted in



1963 in *Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandos*, and the more than 3,500 characters in the "Marvel Universe" will continue to smoke in the comic

books produced by the company, she said, although only a small number actually do.

"Marvel characters are known for

their elements of reality," she said. "They have shortcomings and failings in addition to their more noble characteristics."

Bellaire Comics owner Andy Sanchez said no one has complained about comic characters smoking, although parents sometimes complain about violence in the comic books.

"I think Marvel made a trendy choice. It's the same as McDonald's and Jack-in-the-Box banning smoking," he said. "They want to be perceived as wholesome."

Sanchez said he does not expect a sudden run on the cards remaining from the series issued last November. "They still sell well, but most of the kids have collected their sets already," he said. "I don't think the price or value will go up."

Richard Evans of Bedrock City Comic Co. at 6521 Westheimer said the cards are all right as they are, but perhaps Sammy Blum is tackling the wrong villains.

"He's taking on comic book companies instead of the tobacco companies who are causing the problems," Evans said. "But it's a wonderful world we're in when a kid can have power like that over a big corporation."

Austin

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partnership or civil rights, I don't think the average person wants the government to tell them who their family is. That's what it's all about."

To the conservatives who want the policy repealed, the battle may be more glorious than any victory. To them, it represents the symbolic awakening of a political force thought to be dormant in the capital city.

"The idea of a liberal Austin has been a self-fulfilling prophecy for so long it's almost true," said Michael Brandes, the lawyer heading Concerned Texans, which got Proposition 22 on the ballot. "A lot of people didn't think we could pull it off. But we did."

Brandes said his first clue about the depth and breadth of conservative concern over the city's domestic partners insurance plan came at an early morning organizational meeting on Saturday, Oct. 30.

He expected 100 people to stop by and pick up petition forms; 700 people showed up to help, he said.

That interest continues today. Although 21 other initiatives, three contested City Council races and a mayor's race are on the ballot, it's Proposition 22 signs that are plastered on walls and stuck in lawns all over town.

City election officials predict 70,000 voters will cast ballots Saturday, based on the number of early ballots in so far. Typical city elections draw 60,000 voters.

Unaware of the furor it would cause, City Council, on a 5-2 vote Sept. 2, approved a domestic part-

ners insurance plan for city employees after studying how it worked in other cities, including San Antonio, New York, Seattle and Laguna Beach, Calif.

At the time, proponents said it would save the city money in the long run by averting indigent health care needs at city-owned Brackenridge Hospital.

More than 125 people showed up at the council meeting that night to speak out on the issue. Opponents of the change threatened to take their fight to voters, but few thought they could pull it off.

But the seeds of discontent already had been planted.

One of the companies cited by program supporters in Austin was Apple Computer, which had planned to build a service center in neighboring Williamson County.

Williamson County commissioners, who had lured the company, its 1,700-employee payroll and its estimated \$300 million economic impact, suddenly backed out of their agreement to offer a \$700,000 tax break to Apple, threatening the entire deal.

The three commissioners opposing the deal said Apple's domestic partners insurance policy would bring an immoral element — unmarried couples of whatever sexual orientation — to Austin's conservative suburbs.

County commissioners, stung by bad international publicity and the loss of the money the service center would bring, eventually gave in and offered Apple economic incentives.

Shortly afterward, Concerned Texans began its petition drive, which by Feb. 28 had garnered 20,900 names, nearly 5,000 more than needed.

Forces trying to revoke the insurance program say the tax money spent on it could be spent elsewhere.

"The reality is there's a huge number of people against domestic partners insurance and (its supporters) don't have a defensible position in light of the other critical needs in the city of Austin," Brandes said.

More important, Brandes said, the policy represents a City Council wandering into the deep end of a societal problem way out of its depth.

"They're attempting to define what a family is," he said. "That's an issue for the Legislature to take up, not the City Council."

Hugh Strange of the Austin Mainstream Coalition, a group fighting passage of Proposition 22, says Brandes' financial arguments don't add up.

"They're fighting to repeal something that's 0.01 percent of the city budget," Strange said. "If they were concerned about taxes, this would be Proposition 13 (the controversial California tax rollback initiative)."

Domestic partners insurance, he said, merely offers single employees a fringe benefit that married employees have. To repeal it now would mean a pay cut for single employees.

But the bigger issue, he said, is fear.

"These guys have a track record," Strange said. "Their track record is they don't like anybody that's different from them."

"They don't have communism (to fight). Women are not buying their anti-choice message. So what do they have left? They have homosexuals."

Even more important to Proposition 22 supporters, Strange said, is the desire to identify voters for larger political gains. If conservative Christian forces can win this fight, they'll have greater political clout nationally.

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